As part of this unit you need to be able to agree SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) targets and objectives, and the scope of a project with a project sponsor(s) and stakeholders. This can be best achieved if you are already managing a project in your workplace. It is important for your employer to try to give you this opportunity if you are not already managing one.

The ability to set targets is a skill that can be applied in various situations – it is not solely confined to project management. SMART targets are widely used in performance management, so being able to set targets will prepare you to take on supervisory and management roles and duties.

This topic guide covers:
• SMART targets in project management.
1  SMART targets in project management

Before you start
SMART objectives are covered in this unit in relation to the targets agreed between a project’s stakeholders. However, it is important to know that SMART targets can be applied in a much wider range of situations.

SMART targets can be:
• set in performance management between employees and their line managers
• used in educational organisations to measure the performance of learners
• set by parents, carers and social workers when managing children’s behaviour.

Being able to set SMART targets:
• is a valuable skill used in project management
• provides opportunity for progression within an organisation
• can be beneficial for parents and carers.

What does SMART stand for?
A SMART objective can be defined as follows.

Specific – a well-defined and, in most cases, written objective that is specific and clear. Different people will have the same understanding of this target and it is not open to speculation.

Measurable – progress towards achieving a target has to be able to be assessed and measured. It should be clear when the objective has been achieved and the task has been completed.

Achievable – a SMART objective needs to be achievable by the person or the project that the target has been set for. For example, achieving 100 per cent customer satisfaction may not always be achievable.

Realistic – although a target can be set to stretch a person, a team or an organisation beyond their usual routine, it should be realistic and have a very good chance of success based on the available human and physical resources and expertise.

Time-bound – a SMART objective will have a specific time span for its completion. For example, a target to ‘improve the strength of the produced stools’ cannot be considered as SMART because it is not clear how this improvement will be measured and what the time frame for completion of this task is. If the target is set as ‘improve the strength of the stools within three weeks, so each stool can take a load of up to 130 kg;’ then this is a SMART target because it is time-bound and success can easily be measured.

Link
HNC in Manufacturing Engineering: Unit 3 Project design, implementation and evaluation, learning outcome 4, assessment criteria 4.1 and 4.2.
Activity
Consider your current job role and think about your short- and long-term targets and objectives. Prepare a list of between six to ten targets. List your targets in a table similar to the one below and tick if your targets meet the requirements of each element of SMART targets. How would you change a target to make sure all boxes are ticked? Produce a new table with revised targets so that all the targets are SMART.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Measurable</th>
<th>Achievable</th>
<th>Realistic</th>
<th>Time-bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Portfolio activity (2.1)
Write a brief summary to show your understanding of SMART targets. Keep your summary and the table from the activity above in your portfolio.

Specific
It is very important to make and agree clear and specific objectives for a project to avoid any confusion and disagreement in the future. In manufacturing engineering, this normally means predefined and well-documented product or project specifications with complete engineering details. For manufacturing of a part, for example, this means an agreed technical drawing that has information such as material type, dimensions and tolerances, surface quality, quantity and the quality control procedures. If a target is specific then other people and parties will have the same understanding of the outcomes of the project and will be able to carry out the project if needed.

If the project has specific goals and targets, it will be much easier for the project managers and project team to identify:
- what needs to be accomplished
- the specific reasons behind every task in the project
- the requirements and limitations
- who should be a member of the project team
- for larger-scale projects, the best location to carry out the project.

Environmental concerns and legislation can also play a role when setting targets in a project. For example, manufacturers of car engines will have specific targets to meet the legal requirements of their products with regard to the carbon footprint.

Measurable
Every project should have in place concrete specifications and criteria in order to measure the performance of the project. If the project objective(s) is (are) not measurable, then it will be difficult, if not impossible, to know when the project is finished and how much progress has been made from the starting point. This is true for the whole project and also for every task assigned within the project. For example, ‘making an environmentally friendly car engine’ is not a very specific and measurable target. ‘Making a car engine based on specific and given specifications to meet the current European Union (EU) legislation on car emissions’ is more
specific and measurable because the current EU legislation on car emissions clearly quantifies the permitted emission and carbon footprint. Being able to measure progress in a project can also be motivating for team members as it will give them a sense of achievement when the project manager acknowledges their progress. Activities that are not progressing according to the schedule are identified and appropriate action can be taken to rectify any problems.

Progress can be measured using different formats, such as how many parts have been made so far or how much of a particular task has been accomplished. The format is selected based on the specific goals of the project or a specific task within the project. As for the project manager, it is important to know that not everything is predictable; some degree of flexibility is always needed if there is a logical and reasonable explanation why a task has not made predefined and agreed progress.

**Achievable**

It is very difficult to think of setting a target for an individual or setting project goals and objectives if these targets are not achievable. Setting such targets will have a negative effect on the motivation and confidence of team members. It will greatly damage the ‘can do’ attitude of your team members. For example, if a project has to produce a specific part and the part is used by members of the public, then setting 100 per cent customer satisfaction as the target is not normally achievable. A better target for this example would be to achieve a customer satisfaction rate of 2 per cent above a similar product. Another example of an unachievable target is when an individual or the project team have no, or very little, influence on the target. For example, setting a sales target for the manufacturing department would be considered unachievable if the manufacturing department and the sales department are two separate sections of an organisation. Although the product’s quality and cost will be highly dependent on its manufacturing and production, it is the sales department that promotes the products and deals directly with customers.

**Realistic**

Project objectives should be realistic. This does not mean setting targets that are extremely easy or not agreeing to anything that could potentially stretch the abilities of an individual or an organisation by being challenging. In difficult economic times, and with existing competition in the majority of industries, an organisation should be prepared to accept new challenges within its capabilities. Setting a realistic goal for a project largely depends on the availability of resources and it is very important for a project manager to be fully aware of the available physical, financial and human resources before agreeing to targets. Therefore, the aims of one project can be realistic for one organisation or one team but not for others. Sometimes a project goal needs to be redefined to match the available resources. When setting targets for individuals, for example, it is important to consider their current workload as they may only have a limited amount of time available. They might be able to realistically achieve one or more specific targets in a certain time period but not necessarily be able to complete all assigned tasks within the same time frame. A realistic target can be achieved by using different types of resources available to an individual or a project. These targets can be challenging but should always have a good chance of success.
Time-bound

The final criterion for a SMART objective is that it is time-bound. A target with no time constraint is merely a wish. The allocated time can be a specific time by which a task should be completed, or frequencies at which specific actions that are important in achieving the project goal should take place. For example, you might set a specific date by which a certain number of parts should be produced, or you might ask for a report to be produced three times each month, which includes the data and statistics for the parts produced at each interval.

Portfolio activity (2.1)

1. Either for a project you have managed or a completed project in your organisation, look at the original documents that were created before the start of the project and investigate and write a report on the following.
   - What were the objectives of the project?
   - How were these objectives set?
   - Were the objectives SMART? Why? How would you change them to make them SMART(er)?
   - How were the objectives agreed?
   - How would you improve the process of agreeing the objectives of this project?
   - What were the objectives of team members for this project?
   - How were the team members’ objectives set?
   - Were the team members’ objectives SMART? Why? How would you change those targets to make them SMART(er)?
   - How were the team members’ objectives agreed?
   - How would you improve the process of agreeing the team members’ objectives?
   - Are any of the project goals and targets related to pollution, sustainability, recycling, ‘green’ manufacturing and other environmentally related issues? How would you include, and agree, these targets?

2. If you are currently managing a project, collate or create the documents that show the SMART targets of the project and how they have been agreed with other stakeholders, including other members of the project. Alternatively, in discussion with your line manager, produce a similar document about your current roles, responsibilities, targets and objectives and how these have been agreed.

   In your document, make sure that you comment on the relationship between the resources and the targets, and also on parts of the project or your current role that are related to the environment and sustainability.

3. On a current project, are all of your own objectives, and objectives that you have set for other members of the project team, SMART?

Checklist

At the end of this topic guide you should be familiar with:

✓ the concept, meaning and importance of SMART targets
✓ setting targets in a project.
Further reading and resources
www.learnmarketing.net/smart.htm

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